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Scopes, John Thomas, 1900-1970 (MSS 419)

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Descriptive Inventory

MSS 419 SCOPES, John Thomas, 1900-1970

½ box. 8 folders. 75 items. 1925-1982. Originals.

SC2012.109.1

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

John Thomas Scopes was born on 3 August 1900 in Paducah, Kentucky. After graduation from high school in Salem, Illinois, he earned a law degree from the University of Kentucky in 1924. Scopes moved to Dayton, Tennessee and took a position coaching football at Rhea County High School. Having also filled in as a substitute biology teacher, Scopes agreed to stand as the defendant in a test case challenging the constitutionality of Tennessee's Butler Act, a 1925 law that prohibited the teaching of evolution.

The defense team acting for Scopes included Clarence Darrow, the prominent attorney and civil libertarian, and Dudley Field Malone, an attorney and activist who made his primary living from divorce cases. Among the prosecuting attorneys was William Jennings Bryan, the former presidential candidate and Secretary of State, and a renowned public orator.

The heavily publicized Scopes "Monkey Trial" (a term coined by H. L. Mencken) opened on 10 July 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee amid a carnival atmosphere. On 21 July, after 12 days of dramatic testimony, a jury convicted Scopes and he was fined \$100. On 15 January 1927, however, the Tennessee Supreme Court overturned the conviction on technical grounds. The Butler Act itself was not repealed until 1967.

After the trial, Scopes earned a master's degree in geology from the University of Chicago. In 1930, while performing field work in Venezuela, he met and married Mildred Walker, and they became the parents of two sons. Scopes worked as a geologist for oil companies in Houston, Texas, and Shreveport, Louisiana. He generally shunned publicity in his post-trial years, but in 1967 published a memoir of his experience called *Center of the Storm*. He also appeared at a Dayton, Tennessee theatre for the 1960 premiere of *Inherit the Wind*, a film based on the "Monkey Trial."

John T. Scopes retired in 1963 and died on 21 October 1970. Scopes and his wife (who died on 1 December 1990) are buried in Oak Grove Cemetery, Paducah, Kentucky.

COLLECTION NOTE

This collection consists of materials removed from a scrapbook that was probably kept by John T. Scopes and continued after his death by his wife Mildred (Walker) Scopes.

Folder 2 contains mostly letters and notices relating to the trial and to Scopes' subsequent notoriety. Of interest are letters to Scopes from Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Darrow commenting on press reaction to the trial in the South, and a letter from attorney Dudley Field Malone offering his services as co-counsel. Letters from both friends and strangers comment on the conviction and offer opinions on the controversy. Other letters relate to Scopes' participation in the 1960 premiere of *Inherit the Wind*, the publication of Scopes' memoir *Center of the Storm*, and a 1965 book of essays, *D-Days at Dayton: Reflections on the Scopes Trial*; a letter from one of the founders of the American Civil Liberties Union congratulates Scopes on his contribution to the latter book. Also included are invitations to Scopes to appear or speak at various events, including a Rhea County High School class reunion, and to loan or deposit his papers for exhibit. A letter from the mayor of Fayette, Missouri inviting him to speak at Central Methodist College also asks him to verify an anecdote about the genesis of the trial as a publicity stunt for Dayton.

Folder 3 contains two contemporary clippings about the trial and materials relating to later publicity and retrospectives. Included is an event schedule and guest list for Scopes Trial Day, held on 21 July 1960 in Dayton, an undated newsreel script and interview questions for Scopes, and an article in manuscript form focusing on Scopes' interest in socialism.

Folder 4 contains colorful tracts and communiques (one completely in Latin) with religious themes, apparently elicited by the evolution controversy and sent to Scopes.

Folder 5 contains miscellaneous materials, including a program for Scopes' 29th birthday, celebrated in Venezuela, an invitation to a 1960 dinner honoring John F. Kennedy, and cards sent with flowers, including one from Stanley Kramer, director of *Inherit the Wind*.

Folder 6 contains three first day of issue covers for postage stamps honoring Albert Einstein (1939), the Erie Canal Sesquicentennial (1967), and Apollo 8's Christmas message from lunar orbit (1969).

Folder 7 contains lavishly illustrated verse and messages to John and Mildred Scopes from a friend, John "Jack" Stark in Jackson, Tennessee.

Folder 8 contains letters to Mildred Scopes. Included is a 1930 letter from a friend in her home town of Charleston, South Carolina congratulating her on her marriage, and a 1967 letter from a cousin offering reflections on their family. Two 1970 letters, from journalist Bynum Shaw and the brother of a former colleague in South America, offer condolences on the death of her husband.

SHELF LIST

| BOX 1 | Scopes, John Thomas | 1925-1982 | 75 items |
|----------|---------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Folder 1 | Inventory | | 1 item |
| Folder 2 | Letters to John T. Scopes | 1925-1970 | 28 items |

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|----------|---|-----------------|----------|
| Folder 3 | Interviews, clippings, publicity relating to Scopes trial | 1925-1982, n.d. | 12 items |
| Folder 4 | Religious-themed communications regarding evolution | 1934-1936, n.d. | 4 items |
| Folder 5 | Miscellaneous | 1929-1963, n.d. | 9 items |
| Folder 6 | First day of issue covers | 1966-1968 | 3 items |
| Folder 7 | John T. (Jack) Stark | n.d. | 12 items |
| Folder 8 | Letters to Mildred W. (Mrs. John T.) Scopes | 1930-1977 | 6 items |

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS SCOPES, John Thomas, 1925-1982
419 1900-1970

Letters and clippings removed from a scrapbook belonging to John T. Scopes or his wife and relating primarily to the 1925 Scopes trial, his subsequent notoriety, and later publicity and commemorations surrounding the controversy.
½ box. 8 folders. 75 items. Originals.
SC2012.109.1

SUBJECT ANALYTICS

Baker, Lenox D., 1902-1995 F2
Baldwin, Roger Nash, 1884-1981 F2
Bryan, William Jennings, 1860-1925 – Relating to F3
Cantor, Arthur F2
Christmas cards, 1931 F2
Darrow, Clarence Seward, 1857-1938 F2
Darrow, Clarence Seward, 1857-1938 – Relating to F3
Darrow, Ruby (Hamerstrom), 1869-1957 F2
Downing family – Relating to F5
Evolution – Relating to F4
Henning, Willard L., 1910-2001 F2
Inherit the Wind (motion picture) – Relating to F2,5
Inherit the Wind (play) – Relating to F2
Kennedy, John Fitzgerald, 1917-1963 – Relating to F5
Malone, Dudley Field, 1882-1950 F2

Philately B6
 Political cartoons, 1960 F5
 Postage stamps – Apollo 8 F6
 Postage stamps – Einstein, Albert F6
 Postage stamps – Erie Canal F6
 Rethwisch, Henry C., 1897-1977 F2
 Rhea County High School (Dayton, TN) – Relating to F2
 Riley, Christopher F2
 Scopes, Charles Mulley F2
 Scopes, John Thomas, 1900-1970 – Trials, litigation, etc. F2,3
 Scopes, Mildred Elizabeth (Walker), 1905-1990 – Letters to F8
 Scopes, Wilfred F2
 Shaw, Bynum Gillette, 1923-2001 F8
 Smith, Stella M. F8
 Stark, John T., 1888-1984 F7,8
 Tompkins, Jerry R., b. 1931 F2
 Ward, Henry F3

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